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Viewing cable 08BEIRUT302, LEBANON: SAAD CALLS ARAB LEAGUE MEETINGS "USELESS"

If you are new to these pages, please read an introduction on the [structure of a cable](#) as well as how to [discuss them](#) with others. See also the [FAQs](#)

Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#08BEIRUT302**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08BEIRUT302	2008-02-26 13:13	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Beirut

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/16545>
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RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY 1096
RHMFIASS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 2002
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 2264
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFIASS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000302

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA, PRM/FO, AND PM/FO
NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/GAVITO
TREASURY FOR U/S LEVEY
DEPT PASS TO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/26/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PARM](#) [PINR](#) [PREF](#) [MASS](#) [SY](#) [IS](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: SAAD CALLS ARAB LEAGUE MEETINGS "USELESS"

REF: A. BEIRUT 296

[IB.](#) BEIRUT 292
[IC.](#) BEIRUT 286

BEIRUT 00000302 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Michele J. Sison for Reasons: Section 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[11.](#) (C) On February 25, Majority leader Saad Hariri called the February 24-25 round of Arab League meetings "useless." Michel Aoun continued to insist on a blocking third in the cabinet, and Syria does not want the presidential election to take place. Hizballah, meanwhile, was escalating its

activities. Saad pressed for more U.S. and UNRWA assistance in rebuilding Palestinian refugee camps to root out terrorism, and reiterated his calls for more sophisticated U.S. military equipment. End summary.

¶2. (C) Charge Sison, accompanied by Pol/Econ Chief, met with majority leader Saad Hariri, along with advisors Ghattas Khoury and Nader Hariri and notetaker Nadine Chehab, on February 25, immediately following a separate meeting with Arab League SYG Amr Moussa (Ref A).

ARAB LEAGUE MEETINGS "USELESS"

¶3. (C) Saad called the February 24-25 round of Arab League meetings "useless." Aoun was still focused on becoming president himself, and the opposition continued to insist on a blocking third in the cabinet, mainly to enable it to block any decisions on the Special Tribunal. There had, however, been some agreement on the electoral law, i.e., to use the 1960 law as a basis for discussion, but disagreements remained on districting. Saad saw no point in continuing to talk to Aoun or even Parliament Speaker Berri, other than to help ease Sunni-Shia tensions.

¶4. (C) In separate conversations with the Charge, Druse leader Walid Jumblatt and Telecom Minister Marwan Hamadeh each called the summit a "total failure." Using almost identical language, they each said, "We want a president, but not at any price," and, "Amr Moussa's goal seems to be the summit, not Lebanon." In a separate meeting with Pol/Econ Chief on February 27, March 14 SYG Fares Suaid also said Amr Moussa was looking for a diplomatic victory for the Damascus summit. In Suaid's view, Moussa, afraid of being labeled pro-American, accepted the opposition's draft points and was focusing on the details in an attempt to paint to the problem as an internal Lebanese one, rather than admit that Syria was the real problem. The real issue at stake, Suaid said, was Hizballah's arms.

¶5. (C) The Syrians do not want a president, Saad continued. The Assad regime is more concerned with the Lebanon file than the March 27-29 Arab League summit, he explained, because it views Lebanon as Syria's arena for its fight with Israel. Unfortunately, Israel is content with keeping the Assad regime in power. The U.S. needs a Syria policy, he added; "You have ten times more evidence against Syria than you did against Saddam Hussein! He further warned that Syria might decide to follow Turkey's example of entering northern Iraq by engaging in cross-border operations in Lebanon. Syria's agenda is to regain control of Lebanon via Hizballah, he said; it is their "force majeure" and it will happen in the long run.

¶6. (C) Commenting on his recent trip to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Saad said Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed and UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed were "pretty solid vis-a-vis Lebanon" and were trying to help. Everyone in the Arab world is concerned about where we are going, Saad said, adding, what pressure can be exerted on Syria?

¶7. (C) Saad planned to travel to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt and possibly Morocco before the Arab League summit in Damascus to seek more support for Lebanon. He believed the Egyptians would follow the Saudi lead in deciding whether to attend the summit, but cited Libya and Qatar as problematic, saying the U.S. should push the Qataris. The Kuwaitis "probably will be solid," he said, but he still "had a question mark" about the Jordanians' position. Saad also said he planned to travel to Turkey soon. (Note: Saad departed for Saudi Arabia on February 26. End note.)

¶8. (C) Saad dismissed press reports claiming the Saudis were withdrawing \$4.8 billion in investments from Lebanon. If anything, the Saudis may have decided not to pursue potential real estate deals, Nader suggested.

FOR MUGHNIEH ASSASSINATION

¶19. (C) Saad said he did not know how much the assassination of Hizballah military leader Imad Mughniesh would affect Syrian-Iranian relations, but he did believe Hizballah would take some sort of retaliatory action against Israel. Hizballah had been sending him messages to this effect, in addition to escalating its public rhetoric. Furthermore, recent statements by IRGC and Iranian leaders revealed how involved they are with Hizballah, as well as Al-Qaeda, which was responsible for the 1996 Khobar Towers attack. The Iranians and Syrians are deeply involved with Al-Qaeda, he repeated, asking, why are the Syrians investigating who killed Mughniesh, but not how he was killed on Syrian soil?

¶10. (C) Meanwhile, Hizballah was entering people's homes in Lebanon, nearly causing security incidents and forcing Saad to bring all of "our people of the Future Movement" to control the clashes. Showing the Charge pictures, Saad said that Future Movement headquarters had been hit by over 300 bullets in a February 11 incident that had not been reported in the media. Hizballah is preparing something, Saad warned. Noting that the Iranian Ambassador had canceled a scheduled meeting with him a few weeks ago after Saad attacked Iran in a speech, Saad said he would make another speech soon that would be equally tough on Iran.

RAMI MAKLOUF DESIGNATION

¶11. (C) Saad asked whether the recent U.S. Treasury designation of Rami Maklouf had resulted in any actions yet, adding that Maklouf had financial transactions in Romania and the Cayman Islands. A lot of Hizballah funding comes from Africa, carried in cash by people who are 90 percent Shia, he said, promising to provide the Embassy with names.

PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO NORTH LEBANON, PALESTINIAN REFUGEES

¶12. (C) The conversation then turned to Saad's recent trip to north Lebanon, where he announced a \$52 million grant to help build schools for 10,000 students in Tripoli and another 8,000 in Akkar, where there were no public schools. The money would also go towards a university in Akkar, which would be a "serious" religious university belonging to Dar al-Fatwa (the residence of Sunni Grand Mufti Mohammad Qabbani). Saad said he also was providing 10,000 meals a day to Palestinians displaced from the Nahr al-Barid camp following last summer's conflict.

¶13. (C) Saad acknowledged that the "scarecrow" of "tawteen" (Palestinian settlement) was always there. Lebanon could not afford to settle the Palestinian refugees on its soil. It's a delicate balance, he said. Israel recognizes Lebanon's demographic problem, and in 2000 then Israeli PM Barak agreed with President Clinton and Yasser Arafat that Lebanon's refugees would be the first to return to their homeland. But now President Bush's statement in Israel has "ticked everyone off," he said.

¶14. (C) I believe we must rebuild the camps, he continued, to give people hope and prevent them from becoming breeding grounds for terrorists. But this stirs up negative reactions from the Christians. The U.S. and UNRWA could do a lot more to help if they put some "heavy" money into it, he said. The Charge noted that she had discussed recently with UNRWA Director Richard Cook the political impact of this issue. Saad said UNRWA must be more "forward-leaning," using its legal authority under UNSCR 194. It's the only way to fight terrorism, he said. Two to three hundred million dollars is all that is needed. PLO Executive Representative in Lebanon Abbas Zaki, with funding from Abu Mazen, was doing a great job trying to reestablish the Fatah movement inside the camps, to avoid the Hamas situation whereby the IRGC entered the camps.

CALLING FOR COBRAS

¶15. (C) The Nahr al-Barid conflict would have been less of a mess, he added, if the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) had had more sophisticated weaponry, such as Cobra attack helicopters, which were still needed. The PFLP-GC camp in Qousaya was boosting its arsenal, with the Syrians providing all kinds of weaponry, either to destabilize the Bija, or in preparation for an attack from Israel. Qousaya was up on a hill, Saad explained, and can only be attacked by air. We have the pilots, but need helicopters and training, he said. The U.S. has talked a lot about this, but so far has only approved light weapons, even for control of the 450 km border. Furthermore, we have police stations that have no cars, he complained. If we'd had better equipment before the 2006 war, we wouldn't be where we are today. Saad also said the Internal Security Forces (ISF) needed closed circuit televisions, which would cost between \$25 - 40 million.

¶16. (C) The Charge pointed to the recent visit of USD/P Edelman -- the first high-level U.S. visit since she assumed charge -- as evidence that the U.S. was serious about helping the Lebanese Armed Forces with equipment and training. In addition, 300 police cars provided by the U.S. would arrive next month, she said, and would be turned over to the ISF.
SISON